

To: Senator Osten, Rep. Walker, Senator Minor, Rep. France and members of the Appropriation Committee

I am Carol Kent, member and Treasurer of the Board of Directors for United Services, Inc. (USI) USI is the Local Mental Health Authority for 21 towns in Northeast CT. We are a nonprofit organization providing more than 30 programs including Outpatient Mental Health and Addiction Services, Family Programs and Crisis Services.

Thanks you for the opportunity to testify on the state budget.

First, the USI Board is appreciative of the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment you approved in last year's budget. I now request that you to honor the long term plan to address the underfunding of community nonprofits by approving a \$461 million appropriation over five years – an additional 8% increase for FY 2023.

The chronic underfunding of state contracts has resulted in non-competitive staff salaries with 25% of our current budgeted positions vacant. Low wages are the major cause. The current staff is under extreme stress. Vacancy rates result in higher caseloads and longer service waits for our clients. Additionally, staff for the past two years has been working under the stressors of COVID and the increasing community demand for mental health, addiction and crisis services. Service demand is up while we struggle to respond with a 25% vacancy rate!

The Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services currently does not provide the needed financial support to existing programs to keep up with the needs of our communities. We urge you to implement the 8% funding increase.

Adults of Northeastern CT are struggling. Please help us to meet their needs.

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